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ABSTRACT

The varied roles animals had and currently have in different cultures are discussed in this report. Samples of roles drawn from a catalog of 1000 examples indicated that animals have been used throughout history as food, clothing, pets, heroes, mascots, trademarks, and symbols. Suggestions were stated for using this listing of animal roles in a game, or on zoo signs, or in zoo educational programs. Deficiencies and limitations of the list were cited and ideas for developing a system of meaningful patterns to show the relationships between humans and animals were offered. References were made to specific individuals who investigated the artistic, didactic, economic, geographic, historic, psychological, symbolic, and utilitarian dimensions of human's relationship to animals. The findings in the catalog indicated that animals have influenced and continue to influence culture in diverse ways. (ML)

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ANIMALS, CULTURE AND ZOO EDUCATION

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Report of the IZE Multicultural Education Committee
Melbourne, Australia
October, 1986

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ANIMALS, CULTURE AND ZOO EDUCATION:
Report of the IZE Multicultural Education Committee

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ABSTRACT

The Multicultural Education Committee was created at the Edinburgh meeting of the International Association of Zoo Educators to explore the educational potential of the important and varied roles animals had and do have in different cultures. Since that meeting the committee has catalogued approximately 1000 examples of animals as food, clothing, pets, heroes, mascots, trademarks and symbols. Their role in providing traction and carriage, in war, heraldry and as research subjects, are illustrated. There are curiosities, and two or three instances of individual animals credited with significant impact on human history. Collectively the examples demonstrate that animals have played and continue to play a remarkably large and diverse but increasingly easily overlooked part in human culture. Possible uses of the examples for education and deficiencies in them that should be addressed before the next meeting of the association are discussed.

ANIMALS, CULTURE AND ZOO EDUCATION

Five papers and a working session at the 1984 meeting in Edinburgh dealt with multidisciplinary activities in zoo education. Emerging from these papers and the discussion of them was the charge to explore the educational potential of the important and varied roles animals had and do have in different cultures.

Apart from the sheer scope of the problem and the vagueness of the charge was the difficulty of devising a suitable approach and a practical way to efficiently divide the labor of 14 volunteers from 5 countries and to standardize the way information was reported so that it could be organized in some practical way.

About 1000 unduplicated examples submitted by 5 of the volunteers have been cataloged. Mammals dominate, but fish, amphibians, reptiles, and even mollusks and insects are represented. Animals appear as food, clothing, pets, heroes, mascots, trademarks and symbols. Their role in providing traction and carriage, in war, heraldry and as research subjects, are illustrated. There are curiosities, and two or three instances of individual animals credited with significant impact on human history. The catalog demonstrates the variety and importance of animals to humans both currently and historically, so that the committee has met its charge.

But, someone might respond, so what? Is such trivia of any use? One answer to that is that trivia at least makes a good game. Thus, the information has been reformatted, and rules written, for a game that the IZE Board is considering as a possible product for zoo souvenir shops and schools. Another possible use of the information is supplementing zoo signs, which are almost exclusively biological and ecological in

content, with a little information on an animal's relationship to man. A third possible use might be in developing a curriculum on this theme, thus expanding the usual topics addressed by zoo education or zoomobile programs. In fact, we have tried to do just that, and have been presenting such a program in Los Angeles Schools for two years (Churchman and Wood, 1986).

Although the committee made reasonable progress in accomplishing its charge, the results are unsatisfying for several reasons. First, taken individually, each example is trivial, and taken together the set is hopelessly incomplete. At present we have a long, rather indigestible list with separate columns for the country of origin, type of animal, individual name if any, and a very brief explanation. Many of the examples are in themselves fascinating and unexpected: electroshock treatment in medieval Egypt using Nile catfish, tsetse flies and bats as weapons of war, the golden cloth that gave the name to the meeting between Henry VIII and Francis I made from the byssus threads of mussels. The dilemma is that a comprehensive list is needed to demonstrate the pervasiveness of animals in human culture but obscures the generalizations we seek.

The second reason the results may be unsatisfying may lie in the way they are organized. The current system is geographic and reflects the way the work was assigned rather than any clear educational purpose or theoretical system. The dilemma here is that any system threatens to limit the purposes for which the material may be used, or impose a theoretical system on any user.

The third reason the results may be unsatisfying is illustrated by the five entries dealing with the horse as a war animal, representing periods in which its dominance ebbed and flowed with changes in

battlefield technology. There is no comparable history for any other animal, although such histories are needed for a relatively few animals. This is a simple deficiency to correct--once it has been decided which animals warrant their own history.

The fourth reason the results may be unsatisfying is that the results are geographically unrepresentative. There are far more entries from Europe or the United States than from all other areas combined. Most of the remaining entries are from Oceania. Africa, Asia and Central and South America hardly are touched. Once recognized, the deficiency is relatively easy to correct.

The fifth reason the results may be unsatisfying is that the majority of the entries are historical, symbolic and literary. Other relationships, including but not limited to music, medicine, disease, commerce, technology and industry, are inadequately addressed. Again, the deficiency is easily corrected now that it is recognized.

Given these deficiencies, an obvious question is how items were selected for inclusion or exclusion. Each person will think of some favorite and wonder how it have been missed. For example, it is fine to include Kipling because of his wit and feeling for language. But, If Saki's hyena goes in, why didn't his ferret? Speaking of ferrets, what about the general (and very influential) denigration of mustelids in the Wind in the Willows. As Beatrice Potter's newts get a mention, why not their splendid if disrespectful treatment in Wodehouses Right Ho Jeeves?

The basic answer is that nothing submitted was excluded. But, the deficiencies also make it unlikely that we have a representative sample reflecting the relative interest particular animals have for man across all cultures and times. All this makes obvious the impossibility of

including more or less everything about animals in human culture on a world basis. But, this limitation does not make the effort useless. To take a comparable case, the Linnaean system has proven useful because he was able to identify an underlying order despite literally millions of omissions. Similarly, once we have corrected the deficiencies listed above and can claim a reasonable sample, we too can ask if there are meaningful patterns or a useful explanatory system for what now appears to be the complex, changeable and contradictory functional and symbolic relationships between men and animals.

Four efforts to develop such a system have been identified, each distinct in method and result. Kenneth Clark (n.d.) based his work on the historical functions animals have served as portrayed in western art. Bernard Rollin (1981) turns to philosophy to explore the question of whether animals have rights. Stephen Kellert (n.d.) employed survey research to infer attitudinal patterns in the United States in the late twentieth-century. Animal activist Elizabeth Morgan (1983) has attempted to catalog the range of attitudes toward animals implicit in animal-related organizations in the United States. Kellert and Morgan proposed formal taxonomies, which are surprisingly similar, and which also accommodate Rollin's concepts quite well, but which require some amplification and modification to encompass the broader goals of the current project.

Beyond these general efforts, others have made more specialized ones that fall within single classifications proposed by Kellert and Morgan. Art historian George Ferguson (1954) has identified symbolic meanings associated with animals in European Christian art. Anthropologist Joseph Campbell (1983) has traced the diffusion of Neanderthal and Cromagnon artistic themes and shamanic cults to,

respectively, Northwest American Indian and Australian Aboriginal art. Psychologist Bruno Bettelheim (1976) has suggested that many of our attitudes are shaped by attributes ascribed to animals in popular fairytales we learn as infants. Fox-Davies (1985) has cataloged heraldic symbols, many of which are based on real and fanciful animals. Marxist social critic William Tucker (1982) sees differences on environmental issues as rooted in social class. Mitchell has classified hunters by type and underlying attitudes toward nature. Baumer (1977) has identified attitudes toward nature associated with such movements as Rationalism, Realism, and Realism through 350 years of European history. Clearly, there are many ways to make sense of man's relationship to animals. Among these are artistic, didactic, economic, geographic, historic, intellectual, philosophical, psychological, scientific, symbolic, teleological, and utilitarian dimensions.

Thus, despite the trivial nature of the individual entries, collectively they lead us to ask why animals matter as a part of human culture. The general answer is clear from the examples: animals have and continue to play a remarkably large and diverse but increasingly easily overlooked part in it. Animals mean a lot to man, and have influenced his culture in the widest sense. As animal specialists, we ought to be aware at the level of specific examples of their different visions and involvements in so many different cultures.

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